

Worship at the Altar, War at the Door

Genesis 4:1–16

An Expository Sermon by Dr. Bradley Rushing

Big Idea

God confronts the sin that grows in our hearts so we will turn back to Him before it destroys us and those around us.

I. True worship begins in the heart God sees before it ever reaches His altar (vv. 1–5)

- Abel brings the firstborn and fat portions from his flock. Cain brings an offering from the ground. The problem is not grain versus animal. The problem is the heart.
- Scripture says God had regard for Abel and his offering, but not for Cain and his offering. The person is mentioned before the gift.
 - God looks at the worshiper before He looks at the worship.
- Hebrews 11 says Abel offered by faith.
 - Abel brought the first and best.
 - Cain simply brought something.
- Cain's worship came from obligation, not devotion.
- When God rejects Cain's offering, Cain becomes very angry.
 - True worship produces humility when corrected.
 - Cain's worship produced hostility and offense.
- Cain did not want God to transform him. He wanted God to validate him.

II. Unresolved anger gives sin room to consume us until it controls us (vv. 6–8)

- God puts the fork in the road in front of Cain,
 - “If you do well, will you not be accepted?”
 - There is still a path of mercy if Cain will turn.
- Sin is pictured like a wild animal ready to pounce.
- Cain says nothing back to God.
- He speaks to Abel instead, lures him into the field, and kills him.

- The first worship scene becomes the first murder scene.

III. God confronts sin not to crush us but to call us back (vv. 9–12)


- God comes again,
 - “Where is Abel your brother?”
 - This is a question aimed at Cain’s conscience.
- Cain responds with denial and sarcasm,
 - “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”
- Before God announces judgment, He gives room for confession.
- Cain refuses. Then God declares the consequences,
 - The ground is cursed against Cain.
 - He will be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth.

IV. Even when judgment falls, mercy still speaks (vv. 13–16)


- Cain goes out from the presence of the Lord and settles in the land of Nod.
 - Nod means wandering. It is not just a location. It is a picture of Cain’s life.
- That is what sin always offers,
 - A moment of power that leads to a life of unrest.
 - A moment of control that ends in isolation and loss.
- Even so, God’s kindness to Cain is meant to point us to something greater.
 - The same God who protected Cain has now provided a far better covering and mark of mercy in Christ.
 - The blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

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